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# THE ART UNION

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ART UNION

VOL. II.

NEW YORK, JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, 1885.

NO. III.

## JOHNNY'S STENCILS.



OVER on the east side of New York, where there were shipyards and wharves bristling with masts, in the days when there were American ships to cleave the seas, is a quiet section of the great town which always reminds me of the days when I used to read Herman Melville and Cooper; when I went in search of adventure with Midshipman Easy, and Mesty, with his filed teeth; and when I cruised in the "Midge" with Michael Scott, and thought a buccaneer or a midshipman, it did not much matter which to me, a more enviable being than the king upon his throne. Alas! I have been over the cruising grounds of my boyhood's heroes since those golden days—those days of Dumas stolen in a garret, and of forbidden fruit, of equal piquancy, devoured under a thicket, lying on my back and dividing my attention between my book and the clouds that went sailing overhead on their airy voyage round the world. The world has fewer secrets for me now, and fewer romances. But I love the sea yet, and will love it till I have passed beyond this mundane area of sensations and sentiments. When I am weary, ill in mind



and body, I can go down to it, and its gigantic whisper cheers me like the kindly voice of an old friend. Its breezes blow the clouds away, and its restless waters bear me off into that realm of fancy where man forgets himself, and is the better for it.

As I love the sea, so do I love its works. I love the battered ships that come limping up the bay, with a tug-boat for a crutch; I love the shambling, uncouth heroes who man them, for I know their lives of peril, privation, hard fare and simple devotion to duty that makes the fore-castle a scene of nobler triumphs than the battlefield.



I have sailed with them, and lived with them, and now and then, when I am tired of men who know too much, and whose hands are ever at your purse or at your throat, I wander off among their vanishing haunts, and give good day to poor Jack, lounging on the wooden settle at his boarding-house door, and smell oakum, and listen to the lapping of water and the clank of chains, and, before I know it, am off a-sailing under the Southern Cross, with the wind making fairy music overhead, with the big sails swelling ghost-like against the burning stars,



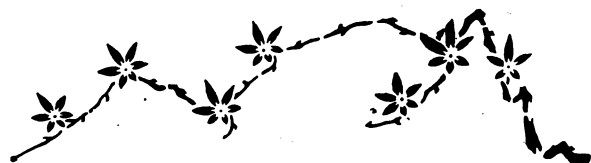
and the drone of a concertina on the fore-castle losing itself in the tinkle and crash of the breaking waves.

I had passed the Falklands on one of these shadowy voyages, and was about to go below and put on flannels for the trip around the Horn, when a voice that had that high pitch, from calling against the wind, that always marks the sailor's, said:

"Avast there, Johnny! Hold her fast now, and mind you get enough ink in the brush."

The speaker was a little, old man, with hair so white and skin so brown that only the race characteristics of his seamed and battered face marked him for a Caucasian. He wore big, steel-bowed spectacles and an old suit of blue cloth, decent and clean, and had gold rings in his ears. He sat on the lower step of a house as little and old-fashioned as himself, and on the upper one was a little white-faced, blue-veined and petticoated boy. Between them, on the step, were a sheet of cardboard, on which the old man held a Japanese brown paper stencil down with both hands, and a saucer of India ink in which the child was dabbing a brush. There was about the quaint old man, the quaint child, and the quaint house a singular harmony of simple oddity. They reminded me somehow of a toy Noah's Ark, in which the ark and its inmates are made for each other, carved by the same hand out of the same material, and could not be separated without losing all sense of fitness and all value.

"All ready, gran' dad," said Johnny, in a thin, sharp, twittering voice, like the call of a bird.



"Aye, aye!" piped the old man with a nod to me, who had stopped, and another nod at Johnny, and a portentous wink, that he performed by shutting both eyes and twisting his face all out of shape in a grotesque earnestness that was too sincere to be laughable, but none the less funny on that account. "Aye, aye, laddy!"

"Then," said Johnny, "heave away!"

And he began smearing the ink from the saucer over the stencil, while the old man held it fast and followed every movement of his hand with absorbed and almost reverential admiration. "A little mite in there, lad," he said; "so! Steady, as she goes. Now, then, don't give that starboard corner the go by. Touch the big flower up a bit," and finally, in his eagerness, he let the stencil go, to point some



overlooked spot out, when a gay little zephyr from the river caught the paper up and blew it off, leaving the transferred impression on the cardboard, sharp and clean. I caught the truant sheet upon the wing, and restored it, with its delicate perforations unharmed, to Johnny, who said,



"Thank you, sir!" and then, "I knew you'd go and do it, gran' dad. That's the third one you nearly spoiled."

"Hear him," chuckled the old man, patting the tow-crowned head with a trembling hand, all lumps and twists like a sea-cedar's root; "and only three years old at that. Only three years old, and the littlest of three, too;" and he went on to babble of the child, and tell me how he had been like him five and eighty years ago, and how he had gone sailing when he was but thrice his age, "and followed the sea, boy and man, for sixty years." The roaring waters had washed his sons down, and his grandson was now drifting "Lord knew where," on an overdue China ship. But here he was, alive and hearty, "sound as a nut," as he averred, with a blow on his chest that threw him into convulsions of coughing and brought a plump and pretty young woman, in a sunbonnet, to the door, in great alarm.

"Grandfather will do such foolish things," said the young woman, patting him on the back like a fractious child. "Now he'll be all of a tremble for the rest of the day."

We raised the veteran up between us, and he tottered indoors, for his legs were no sounder than his chest. We led him through the little parlor, on which the front door opened, and which was crammed in every corner and on every wall and shelf and table with corals and conches, sawfish



snouts and the blades of the savage and savory swordfish, starfish and seaweed dried on cards, and hanging in festoons, and other marine spoil, through a little sitting-room into which the maritime treasures of the parlor overflowed, and out upon a back porch shrouded in grapevine, and

overlooking a garden ablaze with flowers as simple and as beautiful as the lives of their owners. There, in a big, old armchair, whose cushions engulfed him to the shoulders, he soon fell into a doze, while his granddaughter chatted, and the "littlest one of three" brought me his stencils to look at. "His father brought them to him last voyage," said the mother. "He got them in Japan. They're cut with a knife, you see, and all you have to do is lay them on a paper and put the ink over them with a brush, and they make a picture. The children over in Japan" (she said it in as matter-of-fact a way as you would say "over in Brooklyn") "use them for playthings, and his father says Johnny can make as good pictures with them as he ever saw out there. Isn't that one pretty, now?"

They were all pretty. The little sickly child possessed a precocious dexterity not uncommon with children situated like himself, and his stencils were clean and sharp enough to do credit to the artist of the originals. They were, as his mother said, a set of the toy stencils which the happy babes of the Mikado's strange empire imbibe their first impressions of art from. The fact that he graciously presented me with a set, permits me to introduce some of them to you here.

"Grand Dieu! Ces Japonais—ils sont plus forts que nous!" Gustave Doré once said, and they prove it even in the least important of their artistic works. They have, by instinct, essentialized the spirit of art; they have learned, without knowing how, to read the soul of nature. Therein lies their strength. We can teach them to make pictures, but we can learn to feel pictures from them.



Art is not a pastime with them. It is a form of the worship of nature to which they are born, and as long as they adhere to the simple truths of their pictorial faith, they are at their best unique and unapproachable. In proportion as they depart from their singleness of aim their powers decline. There is more art in these simple toys for babies than in the elaborate artificialities into which the caprice of civilized fashion has seduced them, to the debasement of their national genius.

The Japanese are the true impressionists. What an affectation of modern art, swollen with vanity and hungry for sensations, professes, they perform. Its performance is no boast with them—it is a natural outcome of the subtle simplicity of the national genius. The man who makes you Fusi-yama with a few strokes of the brush, who with a couple of slashes of the knife carves you out a rooster or a cat, a lady dawdling over her tea, or a macaw perched upon the bough, sees more in nature than he gives you. But he suggests to you what he sees, and just as nature simplifies herself to him into the cardinal facts, he reduces her for the contemplation of whoever may be interested in his art. These stencils are not the best that he can do, as we all know. But they have in them the rudiments of what is best in his art—its worship of the grand in nature, its instinctive analysis of the organic facts of nature, and its disdain of mean and petty things. When he paints you a beetle it is a beetle, even to the minutest twist of its mailed and clattering body. But when he paints you a landscape he does not see the beetles which it harbors.

But I am not going to weary you with a dissertation on Japanese art. Will you not find it all laid down by Monsieur Gonse and his critical

confres, in volumes upon volumes whose abstract wisdom would astonish the Japanese artist as much as his art amazes us? Here are Johnny's stencils to speak for themselves, with a good batch more in reserve, if you care to call for them. And over on the east side, where there are still a few little brick houses and green trees, and American men and women who do not ape English fashions or worship a lord, Johnny is becoming an artist on the Japanese plan, while his sire plows the billows and his grandsire dozes in the sun. May the



China ship never be overdue again, and may the great grandfather of three bask in the fluttering shadow of the vine till, like one of its ripe grapes, he falls into the mould as into a soft bed. Who knows but Johnny, having learned the lessons of his stencils well, may some day—

But pshaw! I am off on a voyage again, and the printer is waiting.

A. T.



"A DREAM OF MUSIC."

(From the original picture by Francis Miller.)

**A**MONG the young painters whom the past lustrum has brought prominently to the front in America, men of strong performance and still brighter promise, is Francis Miller. A native of Columbus, Ohio, some thirty years of age, Mr. Miller owes the most important lessons of his art to the great school of Carolus Duran, in Paris. He also spent some time and did excellent work in Holland. Since his return to this country some years ago, however, he has devoted himself almost exclusively to studies of national episodes and types, varied with some charming studio pictures of minor importance but ample merit. His "Caboose of the Local Freight," in the Clarke collection, is one of the gems of that remarkable assemblage of pictures; his "Charity Home," exhibited in the Spring Academy of 1884, though handicapped by an unpleasant subject, received a large portion of the interest excited by individual works at that show, and the "Country Railway Station," now at the Louisville Exhibition, is another performance which brings him credit.

Although in such compositions as "A Dream of Music" Mr. Miller's art is graceful and full of charm, there is a robust and dramatic side to his talent by which he will, eventually, become best known. It will be as a painter of action and passion that he will achieve his highest repute. He is a firm and skillful draughtsman, with a keen eye for character and a ready and sympathetic invention, and is a good colorist and an admirable technician.

Credit for the thoroughly excellent reproduction of Mr. Miller's picture herewith presented is due to Nichols & Handy, the photographers and publishers, of this city.

It is often said that art is Catholic, and that it don't matter what country a picture comes from, if the picture is good. This is our opinion exactly; but when it comes to a choice between mediocre foreign pictures and first-class native ones, we become Calvinistic in the rigidity of our devotion to home art. We want all the very best examples of the very best painters we can get, be they the productions of Frenchmen or Fiji Islanders. But we do not want the trade work turned out by machine to glut the market, which constitutes the bulk of the foreign art which comes to our shores.

## THE MANLY ART IN MARBLE.\*

To the Editor, *The Art Union*.

DEAR SIR—The age of chivalry and poetry may be as dead as the hearts that beat when beautiful Hypatia lived and lectured to the students of Alexandria, and Phidias carved dreams of beauty for undreamed of generations to wonder at and worship. The age of the troubadour and of romance, when the olive-skinned lover picked Æolian strains upon his silver-mounted mandolin,—

"Not at her sweet eyes' level,  
Nor above, where the jasmines grow  
Round the golden towers of Seville,  
But there, at her feet, below,"

may be as dead as the dreams of Drake, the sea king, of blustering John Hawkins, bold Amayas Leigh and courtly Walter Raleigh, the gallant men of Devon who sailed Westward, Ho! from merrie England three centuries ago. The age of brass may have disappeared down the bye-ways and alleyways of time, but the age of Sculpture is about to be revived by—our millionaires? our railroad kings? our Vanderbilts, Fields, Goulds, Stewarts, Pullmans, Austin Corbins? No! but by the despised prize-fighter—the contemned exponent of the manly art, the persecuted putter-up of props, the redoubtable and invincible J. Lawrence Sullivan, the hero of 159 bloody frays, the vanquisher of "Tug" Wilson and Paddy Ryan, the King of the Prize Ring himself. He, not the gentlemen one would naturally look to for the great work, has given a new impetus to our plastic art and her dear children by shying his castor into the Sculptorian arena, and commissioning a master of the mallet and the callipers to do him up; not as he, many a time and oft, has done his man (inside of twelve minutes), but in six feet of everlasting Westchester stone, as spotless as his fistic fame.

Did Mr. Sullivan, following the examples of certain other famous American patrons of Art, fly to an alien land for his marble or his artist? Perish a thought so unworthy of an American champion! In the land of the free and the home of the cautious; within the gates of the modern Athens; within sight of the lordly shaft on Bunker Hill; within the walls of the Studio Building, opposite the quaint old Park Street churchyard, where that wonderful, dark, long-haired genius, Martin Millmore, worked and dreamed, when I was an aspiring young man—there, musing over what a man he would have been among the boys in ancient Athens, eighteen centuries ago, had the gods seen fit to cast him there; or, mayhap, reading the glowing passages of Ovid, or listening, with his mind's ear, to the thunder of the Odyssey—or perchance, sadly musing on the golden opportunities Ulysses improved to crack heads, in the Trojan wars—there he will sit to an American sculptor, or stand, rather, to be carved by native genius in native materials, regardless of cost.

And not only will this patron of the Arts Sculptorial and Fistic enrich the artist and revive the dying interest in what threatened to become one of the lost arts of the Western Continent, but, after the heroic piece of work is accomplished, he—will stop there—rest upon his laurels? No! he will then begin to educate the public to a proper appreciation of the glories of our Art, and J. Lawrence Sullivan, by erecting, on a Quincy granite pedestal, in front of his caravansary on Washington Street—HIMSELF!—life-size, with the hands well up, the beautiful bunches of fives doubled, and the old serene look of self-confidence upon his thin, studious, classic face.

And in the gathering twilights of the days that are to be,  
The marble John L. Sullivan the Athens boys will see  
When coming from the contests, where the gladiators' yells  
Ring out, to make a holiday for Athens' brilliant belles.  
And then they'll tell the story of his prowess, sans a club,  
And what he did for sculpture in the old days of the Hub.

JOHN E. MCCANN.

\* According to newspaper report, John L. Sullivan, the pugilist, has ordered a life size figure of himself in marble from a custom sculptor.—Ed. A. U.

THE Chicago papers expatiate with pride on the departure of a rich citizen for Europe with the expressed purpose of there investing \$200,000 in pictures. Yet the Chicago papers recently had the frigid assurance to denounce New York for want of patriotism.